



Take 5

For Safety



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Safety begins at home

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Ah, fall — there's nothing like crisp, cool air, the first months of school and luscious foliage to build excitement about the changing seasons. Many of us are welcoming a break from hot, sticky weather, but we must be aware that fall is also a time of lurking dangers. From carbon monoxide poisoning to fire hazards, the season can be a minefield. By following a few simple tips, however, we can keep our homes and Families safe and healthy during the coming months.

Fire safety

Whether you're a homeowner, rent from a landlord or live in base housing, you should have a qualified technician clean and inspect your fireplace, furnace and/or central heating system annually and make necessary repairs. Remember to open flues when using a fireplace and burn only wood. Burning trash, cardboard boxes and Christmas trees in a fireplace increases the risk of uncontrolled fires.

It's important to give space heaters space. Keep the area around space heaters — at least three feet on all sides — free from other objects and debris. Unplug space heaters when not in use, and always use proper fuel in kerosene heaters.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Joseph Reese, senior maintenance/logistics officer at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, suggests a two-pronged approach to reduce fire-related injuries: install and test smoke alarms on every level of your home, and then create and practice a fire escape plan for your household if the smoke alarm goes off.

Other fire safety tips include:

- Clean and/or replace furnace filters on a regular basis.
- Clean dryer exhaust ducts and surrounding areas regularly. Remove all lint, dust and other materials.
- Check electrical outlets for potential fire hazards such as frayed wires or loose-fitting plugs. Be sure not to overload electrical outlets, fuse boxes, extension cords and other power sources.

- Keep a multi-purpose fire extinguisher accessible, filled and ready for operation.

With heating units running at full blast, carbon monoxide poisoning is a real threat. CO is an odorless, colorless gas formed by the incomplete combustion of organic substances such as fuels. It's dangerous because it interferes with normal oxygen uptake for humans and other oxygen-breathing organisms.

Simple measures can prevent CO poisoning. Ensure all fuel-burning appliances and heating devices are vented and maintained properly. Know the symptoms of CO poisoning and install and maintain CO alarms in your home, testing them every six months.

Slips, trips and falls

According to the Home Safety Council, slips, trips and falls are the single-greatest hazard causing injuries and deaths at home each year. Autumn is a good time to look closely around your property and take care of maintenance problems that could cause slips in the winter months. Make sure outdoor lighting is adequate, repair porches and steps and store summer items that could trip you or your guests.

Household poisons

National Poison Control records show more than a million American children under the age of 5 are exposed every year to potential poisons like medications and typical household chemicals. Simple steps — using child-resistant packaging as instructed and locking medicines and household chemicals in cabinets and cupboards, among other measures — will safeguard children from accidental poisoning.

Many adults and elderly citizens are also involved in potential poisoning situations that can be avoided with education and preventive measures. The national poison hotline, (800) 222-1222, is free, can be reached from anywhere in the United States and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

For more information on home safety, visit www.homesafetycouncil.org.

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